

THE STUDY OF MAN

WHAT GERMANS THINK—AND WHY

The Authoritarian Pattern from the Cradle On

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MOST studies of German public opinion made since the end of the war seem to point to this conclusion: after living under the Nazi dictatorship and scrabbling among the ruins of total war, all classes of the population still cherish the familiar German ideas of nationalism, militarism, and authoritarianism.

As late as September 1949, for instance, interviewers could find no more than one-third of the population in the American Zone favoring reintroduction of compulsory military training. Yet even those opposed to it saw great educational and ethical value in such training inasmuch as it was "a good schooling in self-discipline . . . the best way to train real obedience . . . good for training discipline and maintaining tradition"; few were critical of the

values that are emphasized in the military way of life, or connected it with war. Other studies have revealed that a majority of the population will usually agree that "some races of men are less worthy than others," and foremost in their catalogue of dislikes are the French, Italians, Poles, Russians, and the DP's—not to mention the Jews.

Thus, in an opinion poll taken in December 1946, 18 per cent of the respondents said they would not live in the same street with a Jew, and another 21 per cent that they would not live in the same house with a Jew; while even in the 20 per cent of the population that was most liberal, one-fifth refused to say that Jews should be permitted to eat in the same restaurants as non-Jews.

Again, while more than two-thirds of the population usually express themselves as generally in favor of a democratic form of government, the percentage of those who specifically favor it for Germany is often smaller. E. G. Fried and M. F. Lissance (*Journal of Abnormal and Social Psychology*, January 1949), who interviewed 225 young German men and women between the ages of eighteen and twenty-eight, found less than half in favor of democracy for Germany, and almost half in favor of some form of dictatorship or monarchy. Even the most convinced democrats had a rather hazy understanding of democratic processes: many, when pressed, felt that only the most intelligent should have a say in political affairs, or that democracy should be based on a combination of representative government and the *Fuehrer* principle.

On one questionnaire Germans in the American Zone were given the following alternatives: "In a democracy people can vote and

THE "German mind" has been one of the major problems of postwar reconstruction; obviously, our hope for a change towards democratic government in that country depends mainly on a change of mind from traditional German authoritarian attitudes to democratic ones. Consequently, since the end of the war in 1945, Germany has been an important seat of operations for American sociologists, psychologists, and anthropologists, all trying to throw light on the crucial puzzle. ROBERTA S. SIGEL here reviews some of the material, published and unpublished, dealing with postwar German attitudes, and in particular with the bearing that German family life and child-raising methods have had on these attitudes. Mrs. Sigel holds a Ph.D. degree from Clark University, and is a member of the faculty of Smith College. She is indebted to the State Department's Office of German Public Affairs for permission to make use of unpublished Military Government polls.

speak as they wish and have the kind of religion they want. What do you think is more important: Should a government secure these rights for all the people or should it guarantee jobs and economic security?" Fifty-three per cent said a government should guarantee economic security, only 11 per cent that it should secure democratic rights, 31 per cent that it should do both. In Berlin, regarded by some observers as a bastion of democracy, 68 per cent favored economic security above civil rights. (This may mean that the question was not a good one: many people of political sophistication might feel that freedom can survive only if it rests on a basis of economic security; yet it is noteworthy that less than one-third availed themselves of the opportunity to choose both.)

Even today majorities—although slim ones—of the German people hold that National Socialism represents "a good idea badly carried out." Nor can this frame of mind be considered only the result of twelve years of Nazi indoctrination among the youth; it is as strong among older people as among younger, and strongest among those over sixty years of age. The acceptance of National Socialism as a good idea badly carried out is so widespread and shows such negligible class differences that one Military Government report concluded: "Indeed it is not too much to say that only among German Catholics is there a consistent tendency on the part of a large population group to be skeptical of Nazi values."

EFFORTS to explain the persistence of such political attitudes in Germany have most often concentrated on historical, economic, and even geographical causes. In recent years, however, under the influence of psychoanalytic theory, some American social scientists and psychiatrists have turned their attention to German child-rearing and educational practices in search for clues to explain adult political behavior. Two books dealing directly with this problem have been published: David Rodnick's *Postwar Germans* (1948) and Bertram Schaffner's *Fatherland—A Study of Authoritarianism in the German Family* (1948); Rodnick studied a relatively small group of factory workers in Western Germany who engaged also in part-time agriculture to supplement their incomes; Schaffner's book is based on intensive interviews made by the Information Control Division of Military Government, which screened applicants for important posts. But probably

the richest source of information is in the polls of the Opinion Surveys Branch of our Military Government, taken in German homes by trained German interviewers.

In the German home, all these studies agree, the most important person is the father. David Rodnick, it is true, takes exception to the general picture of the German father as aloof from his children (this disagreement may be the result of the rather special nature of the working-class group Rodnick studied); but he is in agreement with Schaffner and with the opinion and attitude surveys in finding that the German father tends to be a strict disciplinarian and a figure of absolute and unquestioned authority in the family.

In the fall of 1945, German prisoners of war in the United States were tested on a set of attitude scales developed by Morris Krugman ("A Study of German POW's," *American Journal of Orthopsychiatry*, July 1949), one of which elicited typical attitudes on the family, women, and children; in addition there was a "truth scale" designed to reveal inner inconsistencies and untruthfulness of replies. A few years later the same questionnaire was given to 2,340 Germans in Germany, including groups of youths and university students, groups of political prisoners, and cross sections of the population in the American Zone and the Western sector of Berlin. In both studies, there seemed to be no doubt in the minds of the respondents that "the word of the father has to be an inflexible law in the family"; only among university students and political prisoners did this statement not meet with majority approval—and there was room to wonder whether the prisoners were not responding only out of a deeper acceptance of Nazi ideology, which in its extreme manifestations had attacked the traditional authority of the parents and the home. The majority also approved the statement that "children should blindly obey the law and orders established for adults," again with only the university students and the political prisoners dissenting in any large number. And more than a third of those interviewed agreed that "it is a sign of weakness if a father shows affection for his children."

The intensive interviews of the Information Control Division, reported in Schaffner's book, give further support to this picture. Again and again, when interviewees were asked about any demonstration of affection or fondling by either parent during childhood, they responded: "We

don't do that after four or five years." (David M. Levy has also observed that fondling apparently ceases after infancy. See *Psychiatry*, May 1948.)

Whatever overt affection the German child receives seems to come from the mother, and the opinion of the respondents was that women are inclined to be excessively emotional, and that a father who does not exact complete and unquestioning obedience is a poor father who will not win the child's respect and will undermine the necessary respect for authority in general.

Under this regimen, most children learn relatively quickly that obedience and conformity are important. Even Rodnick, who found much more affection in German family life than other observers, stresses the fact that German children of all social classes are excessively polite and well-mannered, highly disciplined, and completely subservient to the wishes of adults. When visiting German homes, Rodnick never saw anything like what we would call "showing off" by the children, and always saw speedy and unprotesting compliance with adult commands.

IT WOULD seem, further, that Germans place so high a value on discipline that they are willing to give the school as well as the home great latitude in choosing appropriate methods to enforce it. When the Opinion Surveys Branch interviewed 3,400 adults about the desirability of corporal punishment by the school teacher, most of those interviewed did not even know that at the time it had been made illegal (it has since been reinstituted in parts of Germany), and a majority expressed themselves in favor of allowing teachers to beat or whip disobedient or unruly children. Most of the respondents felt very strongly about this, and parents of school children did not diverge from the general view. Feelings in favor of corporal punishment were somewhat stronger among people in small towns who were members or sympathizers of the Christian Democratic Union or the Christian Social Union. Only three groups opposed corporal punishment: the best educated, members of the Communist party, and those who had no church affiliation—the last two constituting very small groups. Nazi affiliation made no difference—corporal punishment was approved by 66 per cent of those who had never been affiliated with the Nazi party, and by 62 per cent of those who had.

In general, severe discipline and corporal punishment were favored by all groups, and even the deviation among the best educated was insignificant. Even the young university students, who showed themselves on some questions less authoritarian than the rest of the population, went along with the others when it came to child-rearing.

Confirmation of this last point is found in the previously mentioned study by Fried and Lissance of a group of university students who were sufficiently free of Nazi affiliations to be permitted to return to the universities at a very early stage. While these young people held non-authoritarian views on some political questions, their views on child-rearing seemed unaffected: "These prospective parents conceive primarily of one reaction to negative behavior: punishment." Less than 10 per cent indicated that they would try to find the cause for consistent disobedience before resorting to punishment. And punishment is also thought of primarily as corporal punishment—"the whip is still considered the most effective tool of child-rearing"—while verbal pressure does not mean reasoning with the child but "severe contempt and other serious forms of shaming." A majority of the students felt that self-expression was to be kept at a minimum and that even children under six were not to be permitted any signs of aggression. (A few felt that boys might be permitted a little bit of aggression or even a limited amount of freedom, such as choosing their clothing for the day.) For almost all of these young people, aggression and freedom in children represent an "insult to the parent's authority which, for the maintenance of his self-esteem, he very much needs to protect."

How do German children feel about all this? A few studies can be cited, but only with some caution, because they are based on small samples.

A British psychologist, A. Kaldegg, reports in the *British Journal of Psychiatry* (September 1948) on the results of a "projective" test given to German and English schoolboys of similar socio-economic background between the ages of eleven and fourteen. Seventy-nine German and 129 English boys were shown a picture of a boy seated with his back to them, and the teacher then asked questions designed to permit wide latitude in response. One question was: "One day when the boy was out with his parents, the parents got cross at him. Why?"

Most of the German boys could think of only one reason for parental crossness—disobedience. And without exception they could think of only one way of handling the situation—punishment, usually corporal punishment. The English boys, on the other hand, thought of a variety of answers to the first question, and only 10 per cent of the older boys and 20 per cent of the younger ones mentioned corporal punishment, while many avoided punishment altogether, searching for other solutions. The German children always had the father mete out the punishment; the British children, when they suggested punishment, assigned this duty to both parents. Older English boys of the upper social groups particularly tried to avoid suggesting punishment, while social class made no difference in the German responses.

Another question was: "Why did the parents get cross with each other one day?" Many of the German boys resented this question to the extent of refusing to answer it or saying it could not happen because father was always right; those who did offer an answer tended to put the blame on the child, saying he had misbehaved. The English boys found it easy to think of many possible reasons for the parents' irritability, showed no resentment at the question, and only a few thought of blaming the boy.

Worth mentioning also are the behavioral differences noted during the test. German boys took the test much more seriously and were concerned about doing well on it. The author, in fact, states that they treated it like a life situation, and thought he could detect their identification with it from the fact that they resented some of the questions. None of that was found in the English boys. Aside from the general anxiety the Germans portrayed toward the test situation as such, Kaldegg reports much anxiety in them over school, wrongdoings, and home situations. Here too they differed from the English boys. Connected with this anxiety might be the hostility shown on some of the answers. Asked with whom the boy did not like to play, the German children were never at a loss to think of someone. Twenty-nine per cent of the English boys wrote "nobody." The German boys were particularly scornful of cowards and mothers' darlings while the English boys disliked bullies or ruffians, but generally speaking their dislikes did not seem to be very deep-seated.

Another comparative study undertaken by Donald V. McGranahan and reported in the

Journal of Abnormal and Social Psychology (July 1946) showed that German school children of varying educational and social backgrounds exhibit a remarkably homogeneous system of values and one quite different from that of a similar cross section of American children. McGranahan interviewed some German children who had gone through the public schools under the Nazis and some who had gone to a private school which he describes as having been anti-Nazi. When asked to state the worst crime a boy could commit, the German children from both schools listed crimes against the state (treason was first), while American children listed crimes against other individuals (murder took first place). Similarly, the Americans valued fair play and cooperation as the greatest social virtues while the Germans put patriotism first. German children also disliked many non-German groups such as Poles, Italians, etc., and held them to be inferior. More than that, the German children on the whole had little faith in the morals or intelligence of the common man, even the German one. Yet, "in spite of defeat, the German youth appears to have maintained a stronger attitude of national superiority over other peoples than is held by American youth."

ALL writers have commented on the great variety of dislikes shown by Germans, from a dislike of other nationalities to a dislike of other economic or social groups. Rodnick thought he could observe such hostility directed against almost any group other than one's own—whether German or not—and he connects this hostility and self-centeredness with the submissiveness taught in early childhood, assuming, not unreasonably, that such submissiveness must leave a deep reservoir of repressed resentment.

Perhaps also connected with German training for submissiveness and conformity are two reactions which came out when Military Government pollsters asked Bavarian high school children about their ambitions. Almost all indicated humble and prosaic job aspirations, and most of them chose the same vocations as those of their parents. Of course this may indicate no more than a sense of reality, since social mobility in Germany always has been limited and might well have become more so since the war; but in the context of other evidence, we are probably justified in thinking this attitude expresses more than lack of opportunity.

THE heroes of these same German children are, of course, cut from less ordinary cloth. A quarter of them named monarchs, notably such warrior monarchs as Frederick the Great and Charlemagne. Almost one-fifth named Bismarck, 10 per cent named Hitler, 15 per cent named Goering, Goebbels, Himmler, or Rommel, and somewhat less than a third named poets. On this point, the findings differ somewhat from the results of a youth survey in the American Zone, when hardly anyone named a National Socialist figure as his hero. But if we note that 40 to 50 per cent of the youth even in that survey made no choice at all, and that only a little more than one-fifth named Goethe or Schiller, we may wonder whether the result really is so different, or whether this last group was not perhaps more discreet. It is certainly noteworthy that except for the great symbols of German cultural pride—Goethe and Schiller—no person was selected who was not in one way or another a man of political or military action; religious leaders and even the great German musicians and painters are entirely absent. McGranahan, in his comparative study of American and German youth, also found that German children much more frequently than American chose political, military, and national leaders.

The tendency learned at home to accept authority without demur and to admire strong leadership is reinforced by the child's later social, play, and school associations, for German society is highly stratified and the child is likely to associate only with children of his own socio-economic group. The school to which a child will go is seldom determined by his abilities, but reflects the socio-economic status of his parents; by the age of ten, children are separated into the secondary schools (*Gymnasium*, *Lyzeum*, and *Oberrealschule*) and the public schools, the latter being roughly comparable to our vocational schools except that most German students complete their education in them by the age of fourteen. (In the American Zone, 81 per cent of the population had attended school for less than eight years while only 7 per cent had an education of twelve years or more.) If we consider also that the position of the German teacher is analogous to the authoritarian position of the father, that much learning is by rote or drill, and that stress is on memory rather than the development of critical faculties, it is easy to see how the school merely enforces a pattern learned at home.

German parents are apparently well satisfied with this. Adults questioned by the Surveys Branch in Berlin and Stuttgart, though bitterly dissatisfied over the present shortage of teachers and facilities, fully accepted the old values of German education. When asked what they considered to be the chief aim of education, the two most popular answers were: to give children a comprehensive general education, and to train them in order and discipline; development of independent thinking was the least frequent choice. Here again we find little difference between classes, except that people over fifty tended to give the most conservative replies, and the well educated and the well-to-do showed a slightly higher preference for the development of independent thinking.

The extent to which German children themselves have come to accept this authoritarian pattern is strikingly illustrated by an incident reported by Schaffner in *Fatherland*. In the summer of 1946, American Military Government began to permit meetings for the purpose of political discussion and education. Special emphasis was placed on attracting young men and women between the ages of fifteen and twenty-two who had refused to join Nazi organizations. However, the parents and teachers of the young participants insisted on attending with them. The first meeting got off to a propitious start when an eighteen-year-old student gave a report on what he believed to be American attitudes towards individuals and individual freedom. The young people in the audience voiced their approval. But the older generation reacted quickly and vigorously. A school teacher asked the group how one could be expected to conduct a class if students felt free to question the instruction—"it would be embarrassing." Others chimed in to say that young people could learn only from adults and could not be depended on to make decisions. Parents said with great feeling that there had been too much freedom for children and adolescents under the Nazis, and that they wanted a restoration of "decent" family life and a return to respect for parents and authority. Not one young person had a rejoinder: the older generation won the debate.

In view of the failure of this meeting, the American observer asked the group to divide into two for future meetings, one for the younger persons and one for the older. However, the parents were so visibly indignant at this suggestion that the meetings had to con-

tinue as before, except that each week a second meeting was held for the young people alone. None of the meetings accomplished much.

Nor do German children chafe under adult supervision. All the interviews at the screening center indicate that most German adults have a nostalgic longing for their childhood as a period of stability and safety. In the words of Schaffner: "Children are not only denied freedom but induced not to want it." Rodnick, too, observed that the real conflict begins when the young person suddenly has to fend for himself: "The average German feels lonely even among Germans. He has a strong desire to identify himself with any group that will offer him warmth, affection, and importance." Hence the tendency to search for a substitute father figure in adult life.

IN SPITE of women's suffrage and the increased participation of women in politics and the professions since World War I, their role still remains for the most part subordinate. Men and women alike seem satisfied with this arrangement. The sphere of the woman, for most classes, is still confined to the home, and there also she is subordinate. In a sentence-completion test administered by the screening center, majorities in excess of 70 per cent expressed disapproval of "a mother who interferes when a father is punishing his son," criticizing such a woman for her "primitive instincts," her inadequacy as a wife and mother, her lack of intelligence. Even among the less than 30 per cent who could see some justification for the mother's actions in cases of particularly severe punishment, approval was mixed with criticism. Not one respondent criticized the woman's action in terms of the inadvisability of father and mother quarreling before the child; all seemed concerned above all with the threat to the father's authority.

The same Germans—non-Nazis, or even anti-Nazis, it should be remembered—criticized women severely for attempts at independent intellectual activity. When respondents were asked to complete the sentence, "When a man expresses his political opinion, his wife should . . ." the most frequent answer was "keep still." In evaluating German reactions to women's political opinions, Schaffner writes: ". . . it is not necessary to divide the answers into predominant or minority responses, since all the answers reflect subordination of the German woman to her husband in the home."

In two other surveys, a majority approved the statement that women should be allowed to have the same jobs as men, but when asked whether they thought that women of equal abilities had the same chances as men of securing a government position, large majorities realistically asserted that men's chances were superior. Did they then disapprove of this discrimination? No, two-thirds thought it was a good thing. Even 65 per cent of the women were in favor of discriminatory treatment. This approval of job discrimination on the basis of sex goes through all classes, but it is most pronounced among the people with the least education, where only 23 per cent opposed it, and least pronounced among those with nine or more years of education, where 45 per cent opposed it.

IF THE studies reviewed here reflect a predilection among Germans for authoritarian modes of behavior, the question still remains: how typical are these attitudes of *all* Germans?

The evidence is that on the whole such attitudes seem significantly homogeneous, cutting across differences of sex, age, and socio-economic status. From Krugman's data, one important variant factor seems to be place of residence. Inhabitants of Hesse consistently respond in a less authoritarian fashion than inhabitants of Bavaria and Württemberg-Baden, two overwhelmingly Catholic *Länder*. Towns with less than 5,000 persons (especially those under 2,000) show the most authoritarian tendencies with regard to the family. Occupationally, professional people score above average in non-authoritarian attitudes, farmers and unemployed below—this, of course, goes hand in hand with education, as the lower occupational groups also have less schooling. It is perhaps an interesting commentary on the efficacy of Nazi education that the young people in general show a comparatively strong predilection for non-authoritarian responses.

From all this, it is understandable that some observers should conclude that German tendencies toward authoritarianism in politics and economics can be traced directly to the family and its methods of child training. The authoritarian father suppresses initiative in the child and conditions him to accept any form of authority unquestioningly. The frustrations of such a stern childhood, in turn, create feelings of hostility toward outgroups which then from time to time find expression in violent political

outbursts. But the evidence for such a simple explanation is far from conclusive.

TRUE, studies undertaken in this country would tend to confirm the hypothesis that authoritarian personalities on the whole come from families where discipline exceeds affection and where the father looms as a huge and forbidding figure. We also have evidence that where submissiveness is seemingly complete, there is often a great deal of latent hostility which not uncommonly expresses itself in prejudice towards other groups and even in a desire for their destruction. But these studies were made in the United States with American subjects, and it is probable that their results could not be transplanted to other countries without further consideration and elaboration. However, the one comparable study which was made in Germany in part tends to corroborate those findings. David M. Levy, reporting an intensive study of twenty-one German anti-Nazis (*Psychiatry*, May 1948), observes that those whose attitudes were not just anti-Nazi but generally more liberal usually had "escaped the conventional rigid family structure. They have been brought up with more affection and less restraint. . . . Often . . . by their mother or by indulgent grandparents. The men whose early lives were featured by a strong and affectionate maternal influence . . . revealed [more individual and independent] personalities. . . ."

No doubt the existence of authoritarian personalities both in this country and in Germany can in part be traced to childhood experiences. But while such personalities can be found in any societies, we know perfectly well from historical evidence that not all societies afford them an opportunity for political ascendancy. A strictly patriarchal family has been the rule rather than the exception in most countries during the last century, and yet not all these countries embraced authoritarian forms of government. In the United States, for instance, discipline was much stricter in the families and schools of the 19th century than it is today, and the country was by no means less democratic than it is now. Even at a time when women and children had few legal and social rights, and when the father was the dominant figure in the family, our culture reflected great devotion to the ideals of freedom, tolerance, and individual initiative. There existed a faith that society offered unlimited opportunity to all who were capable of grasping it and that this

was a good and just way in which to arrange a society. Even those people whose practices were the most autocratic joined in the general protestations about the value of democracy and the worth of each individual human being. Freedom and personal initiative were undisputed values of our culture, child-rearing methods notwithstanding. That there were, under American political and social conditions, opportunities for their exercise, and that they brought rewards are reality factors that of course cannot be ignored. Hence the ease with which some social scientists in our country have concluded that the authoritarian personality is maladjusted. But what about this personality in a country where authoritarian action is the rewarded mode of behavior? Can we glibly say that there too the authoritarian personality is exclusively the result of stern child-rearing practices? Hardly so.

In the German cultural tradition, for instance, there is little general manifestation of love for a classless state, for freedom above obedience, and for the glorification of personal initiative. In the past as in the present, most German institutions from the family to the school, the professions, the state, have been organized along hierarchical lines. Conformity and submission to authority is expected in most social institutions in Germany. Thus the German adult learns that the same modes of behavior are rewarded in adulthood that were rewarded in childhood. German society as a whole would seem to put a premium on the disciplined, submissive subject; the general life reinforces rather than counterbalances the authoritarianism of child-rearing; and this all-pervasive authoritarianism allows the authoritarian personality an opportunity to find full political expression. Social scientists who emphasize the role of the family and the educational system in molding the German character have performed a valuable service in isolating one crucial factor in German authoritarianism and one that certainly can play a role in continuing undesirable undemocratic attitudes in the postwar period. But we must not succumb too easily to the lure of single, clear explanations; if our aim still is to "re-educate" Germany, we must consider all the other institutions of German culture before we can, to quote Schaffner, know "at what point we can make the most significant interruption of the psychological vicious circle, family-society, society-family."